

Comparing the Teachings of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and Abū Madyan

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Abstract

This study looks to identify commonalities between the ideas of the prominent sixth/twelfth-century mystics ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166) and Abū Madyan (d. 594/1198). As will be shown, they not only overlap in their emphasis and interpretations of certain features of the mystical path, but in fact rely on a common basic understanding as regards mystical endeavors overall.

Keywords

‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī – Abū Madyan – *faqīr/faqir* – *murīd/shaykh* – *tawba* – *samā’* – *ṣidq/ṣādiq* – Sufism/ṣūfī

Introduction

While spending most of their lives in different corners of the Islamic World, Iraq and the Maghreb respectively, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166)¹ and Abū Madyan (d. 594/1198)² are amongst the most recognized

¹ Hereafter referred to simply as “Abd al-Qādir’.

² For an alternative dating of Abū Madyan's death, see Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf al-Tādili, *al-Tashawwuf ilā rijāl al-taṣawwuf* (Rabat: Kuliyat al-Ādāb wa-l-‘Ulūm al-Insāniyya, 1984), 319; Claude Addas, ‘Ibn ‘Arabī and Abū Madyan’, in *Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi: a commemorative volume*, ed. Stephen Hirtenstein and Michael Tiernan (Shaftesbury: Element for the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society, 1993), 175–6.

mystics³ of the sixth/twelfth-century. Both men became primarily known through their efforts as teachers and public preachers, as a result of which they enjoyed considerable influence amongst large segments of their local communities. Posthumously, both individuals became the focal points of extensive saint veneration. Their work as teachers and spiritual guides has in each case yielded a handbook for the aspirant (*murīd*) of the mystical path, which will serve as basis for this comparison. ‘Abd al-Qādir left us with the large manual of instruction *al-Ghunya li-ṭālibī ṭarīq al-ḥaqq* (sufficient provision for the seekers of the path of God), which includes the shorter *Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn* (the book of conduct of the mystical novices).⁴ As for Abū Madyan, we have his *Bidāyat al-murīd* (the outset on the path of the aspirant).⁵

Beyond such obvious similarities between these two lauded mystics, there have been persistent claims pointing to more intimate connections between ‘Abd al-Qādir and Abū Madyan. Accordingly, biographers of Abū Madyan, going back to at least the tenth/sixteenth-century, have repeatedly related that the Maghrebi *shaykh* met with ‘Abd al-Qādir, usually on the occasion of performing the pilgrimage to Mecca.⁶ It is said that Abū Madyan consequently studied under ‘Abd al-Qādir and hence became his disciple.⁷ Connected to this is the fact that the ideas of the two *shaykhs* have been associated with each other ever since the eighth/fourteenth-century and that it became common for later members of the Qādiriyya order in the Maghreb, in other words, followers of the putative teachings of ‘Abd al-Qādir, to relate to Abū Madyan’s

3 For the purposes of this article, I prefer to rely on the terms ‘mystic’ and ‘mysticism’ rather than the terms ‘ṣūfī’ or ‘Sufism’, in particular when touching on ‘Abd al-Qādir and Abū Madyan and their ideas. The reasons for this should become clear below.

4 ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya li-ṭālibī ṭarīq al-ḥaqq* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1996). From hereafter simply referred to as ‘the *Ghunya*’. For *Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn*, see *Ibid.*, 439–90. As *Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn* is, however, part of the *Ghunya* and the subsequent discussion will draw from content of both *Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn* specifically, as well as from the *Ghunya* as a whole, I will simply refer to the *Ghunya*.

5 Abū Madyan, ‘*Bidāyat al-murīd*’, in *The Way of Abū Madyan: doctrinal and poetic works of Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Anṣārī* (c. 509/115–16–594/1198), comp. and trans. Vincent Cornell, (Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, c.1996). Cornell’s edition of *Bidāyat al-murīd* is the only one that has been available to me for this project. I will, however, for the purposes of this study rely on my own translation of the Arabic text, rather than Cornell’s translation.

6 Earlier accounts apparently described a connection through the legendary figure of al-Khiḍr (al-Khaḍīr), by which Abū Madyan became ‘Abd al-Qādir’s disciple. Vincent Cornell, *Realms of the saint: power and authority in Moroccan Sufism*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 132–3.

7 *Ibid.*, 132–3; Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan*, 10–11.

spiritual path, so much so that the latter was eventually posthumously introduced into the ranks of the Qādiriyya order.⁸

An actual meeting between the two *shaykhs* is unlikely to have taken place, as most modern-day scholars seem to agree,⁹ not least because neither Abū Madyan himself nor any of the earlier and more reliable sources on his life, composed in the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth-century, mention such an event, or even a pilgrimage to Mecca for that matter.¹⁰ From ‘Abd al-Qādir’s perspective, moreover, there is no mention of a meeting with Abū Madyan in the entries devoted to him in the well-known *ṭabaqāt* works.¹¹ Thus, it does seem unlikely that there is any historicity to an encounter between the two *shaykhs*, especially when we take into consideration how frequently accounts of saintly figures in medieval Islam have been subjected to embellishments and apocryphal ascriptions, which is incidentally also the case with ‘Abd al-Qādir.¹²

Be that as it may, even if we discount the possibility that they ever came across each other, it remains noteworthy that the spiritual paths of ‘Abd al-Qādir and Abū Madyan have on occasions been linked over the past centuries and that there was overlap, at least to some degree, between their later followers in the Maghreb. In response, one could argue that people who associated

8 Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan*, 10–11; Addas, ‘Ibn ‘Arabī and Abū Madyan’, 179.

9 Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan*, 10–11; Cornell, *Realm of the saint*, 132–3; and, Addas, ‘Ibn ‘Arabī and Abū Madyan’, 169.

10 The two main accounts on the life of Abū Madyan are al-Tādilī, *al-Tashawwuf*, 319–26; Aḥmad Ibn Qunfudh, *Uns al-faḡīr wa-‘izz al-ḥaḡīr*, (Rabat: al-Markaz al-Jāmi‘ī li-l-Baḥth al-‘Ilmī, 1965). Al-Tādilī, who wrote in the 1220s and seems to have received the reports about the shaykh’s life directly from the latter’s students, is likely the most reliable and therefore often considered as the original account on Abū Madyan. All other extant accounts are of much later origin. Ibn Qunfudh, the second in line, wrote his account in the late eighth/fourteenth century.

11 See for example; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-l-a‘lām* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1989), 86–100; idem, *Siyyar a‘lām al-nubalā’* (Beirut: Manshūrāt Muḥammad ‘Alī Bayḏūn, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2004), 600–7; and, Ibn Rajab, *al-Dhayl ‘alā tabaqāt al-ḥanābila* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1997), 244–53.

12 Already scholars in late medieval Islam such al-Dhahabī (d. 749/1348) or Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1393) show themselves evidently aware of this problem. For modern-day assessments of the authenticity of accounts on ‘Abd al-Qādir, see for example; Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971), 41–2; Jacqueline Chabbi, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Djilānī, personnage historique’, *SI* 38 (1973): 75–106; eadem, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī’, in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Three*, Brill online, <http://www.brillonline.nl/> (hereafter *EL*₃); and, Andre Demeerseman, *Nouveau regard sur la voie spirituelle d’Abd al-Qadir al-Jilānī et sa tradition*, (Paris: J. Vrin, 1988).

the ideas of these two *shaykhs* or followers of the Qādiriyya order who related to the teachings of Abū Madyan did so not on the basis of the actual spiritual methods of either *shaykh*, as set out in their genuine writings, but on the basis of their posthumously embroidered and mythical portrayals, an inevitable outcome of their continuous veneration as saints.¹³ In other words, such an association of ‘Abd al-Qādir and Abū Madyan’s paths would be based on their fictitious posthumous images rather than their actual teachings.

The following study is hence concerned with examining if and how far the two men’s ideas coincided, in relation to works that have been proven to stem from their hands. Given the problem of authenticity with regard to both men’s biography and bibliography, the two texts selected for this endeavor, the *Ghunya*, and in particular the therein contained *Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn*, for ‘Abd al-Qādir and *Bidāyat al-murīd* for Abū Madyan, have both been deemed genuine by recent scholarship.¹⁴ While both can be classified as manuals of instruction for aspirants of the mystical path, there are obvious differences between the two works; the *Ghunya* is longer and often more detailed as well as clearly conceived as a written work. *Bidāyat al-murīd*, on the other hand, appears to constitute a collection of spiritual counsel given verbally by Abū Madyan and was possibly only later assembled in this form by his students.¹⁵

First off, it would seem apt to briefly sketch out the backgrounds of the two protagonists. ‘Abd al-Qādir’s early life is somewhat obscure; he is believed to have been born around 470–1/1077–8 in the region of Gīlān, as his *nisba* indicates, at the south-western end of the Caspian Sea. He then arrived in Baghdad in 488/1095 to study *fiqh*, *ḥadīth* and Arabic literature, amongst others, with the eminent Ḥanbali scholars al-Mukharrimī (d. 514/1120) and Ibn ‘Aqīl (d. 513/1119). He would remain loyal to the Ḥanbali law school throughout his life. Around the time of his arrival in Baghdad, or even before, ‘Abd al-Qādir became drawn to ascetical and mystical endeavors and for this reason seems to have become

13 See for example al-Shattanawfī’s (d. 714/1314), *Kitāb bahjat al-asrār wa-ma’dan al-amwār fi ba’d manāqib al-quṭb al-rabbānī Muḥyī al-Dīn Abī Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī* (Cairo: al-Maṭba’a al-Maymaniyya, 1304/1887).

14 With regard to the authenticity of ‘Abd al-Qādir’s *Ghunya*; see Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 41; Chabbi, “Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī”; eadem, “Abd-al-Qādir al-Djilānī, personnage historique”, 103; Demeerseman, *Nouveau regard*. With regard to the authenticity of Abū Madyan’s *Bidāyat al-murīd*; see Vincent Cornell’s *Realm of the saint*, 134; and, idem, *The Way of Abū Madyan*, 27–38.

15 For the oral transmission of Abū Madyan’s work and its recording; see also Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan*, 36–8.

attached to the locally known *ṣūfī* Hammād al-Dabbās (d. 525/1131) for a while. Upon completing his formal studies, he spent a number of years in spiritual retreats. When he resettled permanently in Baghdad, around 521/1127, 'Abd al-Qādir gained fame as a public preacher while teaching his mystical path and ḥanbalī *fiqh* in his *madrassa*. Amongst his students were the well-known Damascene Hanbali scholars 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Maqdisī (d. 601/1204) and Ibn Qudāma (d. 620/1223). His thought is articulated in at least three works; the here treated *Ghunya*, *Futūḥ al-ghayb*¹⁶ and *al-Faṭḥ al-rabbānī*.¹⁷ 'Abd al-Qādir passed away in 561/1166 in Baghdad.

Abū Madyan, on the other hand, was born around 509/1115 at the fortress of Cantillana, just north of Seville, in al-Andalus. He seems to have been orphaned at a young age and grew up in humble circumstances, being kept as a shepherd by his brothers. After early on becoming aware of an inclination towards Islam and the spiritual path, Abū Madyan eventually managed to escape the heavy hand of his brothers and made his way through Seville and Marrakesh to Fez. There he met the famous Berber *ṣūfī* 'Alī Ibn Ḥirzihim, under whom he was initiated to the mystical path and under whom he studied Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī's (d. 243/857) *Kitāb al-rī'āya li-ḥuqūq allāh* and *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). At the same time, Abū Madyan attended the circles of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Qurashī (d. 568–9/1172–3) a disciple of the great Andalusian *ṣūfī* Ibn al-'Arif (d. 536/1141) and Abū 'Abdullāh al-Daqqāq, a well known representative of the Malāmatiyya movement. To conclude his remarkably broad mystical training, Abū Madyan travelled to the Middle Atlas mountains to study with the extremely popular Berber mystic Abū Ya'zā al-Dukkālī (d. 573/1177).¹⁸ Thereupon he moved to Bijāya, a coastal town east of modern-day Algiers, where he taught a great number of disciples and advised people of all backgrounds in religious and mundane matters. Apparently Abū Madyan's growing popularity aroused the suspicion of the ruling Almohad Caliph Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr (580–95/1184–99), who had him summoned to Marrakesh. It was on the way there that Abū Madyan passed away, close to the town of Tlemcen, in 594/1198. His activity in Bijāya left us with several recognized pieces of writing: such as a collection of his answers given to queries called *Uns al-waḥīd*

16 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *Futūḥ al-ghayb* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li-l-Turāth, 2004).

17 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Faṭḥ al-rabbānī* (Damascus: Dār al-Sanābil, 1996). There are of course a number of other works which have been attributed to 'Abd al-Qādir over the centuries, but the scholarly consensus is that those three pieces mentioned constitute the only authentic and extant work of the man.

18 Or 'Abū Yī'zzā', see Cornell's *Realm of the saint*, 132–3.

wa-nuzhat al-murīd, a collection of his odes, and the mentioned *Bidāyat al-murīd*.¹⁹

The Importance of the shaykh

The following discussion will identify where and to what degree ‘Abd al-Qādir’s *Ghunya*, and in particular the therein entailed *Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn*, and Abū Madyan’s *Bidāyat al-murīd* agree. Given that both works are concerned with the spiritual development of the aspirant (*murīd*), as manifested in their titles, it is little surprising that they both emphasize the role of the *shaykh*. The latter was generally regarded as responsible for guiding the aspirant along the mystical path. That said, there were certainly divergent interpretations of the aspirant-*shaykh* relationship amongst the various mystical circles. With the growing institutionalization of Sufism in the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth-century, which would eventually lead to the establishment of *ṣūfī* orders (*ṭarīqa*) in the early seventh/thirteenth-century, the ties between the aspirant and the *shaykh* became closer.²⁰

The term ‘*murīd*’ conventionally has the connotation of one at the outset of the spiritual path, aspiring to eventually reach the higher levels and the presence of God. It is therefore in western scholarship usually translated as ‘aspirant’ or ‘novice’. ‘Abd al-Qādir does not disagree with the gist of this, but offers a slightly different interpretation. The individual taking up the mystical path is, in his mind, not designated as *murīd* but as *mubtadi*, i.e. a ‘beginner’. Only once the latter has undergone basic inner purification he becomes a *murīd*, which to ‘Abd al-Qādir stands for ‘one who desires God’, coming from the IV form of the Arabic root *r-w-d*, meaning ‘to want’ or ‘to desire’. The point of this is that the stage of the *mubtadi* involves the purification of his heart, until it holds nothing other than his desire (*irāda*) for God. Only then can he be legitimately designated as *murīd*, or ‘one who desires God’.²¹

It also only at this stage, of becoming a *murīd*, that one accepts the guidance of a master (*shaykh*). In fact, for ‘Abd al-Qādir it is inevitable that there is a master to each aspirant, because barring a few notable exceptions such as Abraham or Uways al-Qarānī, this is a divinely decreed custom. God Himself set things into motion by becoming the Master of Adam, later Gabriel became

19 al-Tādili, *al-Tashawwuf*, 319–26; Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan*, 1–38.

20 Fritz Meier, ‘Khurasan and the End of Classical Sufism’, in *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, trans. John O’Kane with the editorial assistance of Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 191–7.

21 ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, *al-Ghunya*, 445–7.

the master of Muḥammad and later still Sarī al-Saqāṭī became the master of al-Junayd.²² The *shaykh* in 'Abd al-Qādir's words acts like a chamberlain who prepares an outsider for an audience with the King, in other words, akin to a middleman between God and the aspirant. Only when the latter reaches God's proximity is he to leave his *shaykh*, as, at this point, God Himself takes charge of his training.²³

The *shaykh-murīd* relationship, according to 'Abd al-Qādir, is based on sentiments of reverence, surrender and trust on behalf of the aspirant, who should, for example, venerate his *shaykh* as the most worthy of individuals, never be at variance with him in any way and entrust himself completely into his hands. The master, on the other hands, is characterized as wise, responsible and compassionate in relation to the *murīd*. While he is supposed to keep the aspirant's pride in check, he should make sure not to overburden him unduly with spiritual exercises beyond his capacities and should personally seek atonement for his *murīd's* minor shortcomings.²⁴ As a consequence of this, a close bond develops between the two, which should help the aspirant to proceed along the mystical path successfully. From this description, it becomes obvious that 'Abd al-Qādir refers to a *shaykh al-tarbiya*, who was in charge of the aspirant's training (*tarbiya*) and academic instruction (*ta'lim*), rather than a *shaykh al-ta'lim*, who merely took care of the aspirant's academic instruction, which appears to have been in keeping with the prevailing trends.²⁵

Abū Madyan puts similar emphasis on becoming attached to a *shaykh*. At the very beginning of *Bidāyat al-murīd* we learn that "the first requirement for the *murīd* is to keep the company of a *shaykh* ...", a dictum that is repeated subsequently.²⁶ Later on, he devotes a short chapter of the work to demonstrating the importance of serving a *shaykh*, for which reason he also draws on prophetic Hadith.²⁷ Beyond that, he urges the reader, presumably after his initial training with a particular *shaykh*, to seek the presence of other *shaykhs* as part of his mystical development.²⁸

Yet, while it is inevitable that one follows a *shaykh*, it is just as important that one chooses to follow a suitable and worthy master. *Bidāyat al-murīd*

22 Ibid., 448–9.

23 Ibid., 447–9.

24 Ibid., 450–3.

25 Fritz Meier, 'Khurasan and the End of Classical Sufism', 191–7.

26 Abū Madyan, 'Bidāyat al-murīd', 55, 71.

27 Ibid., 103–5.

28 Ibid., 69, 109.

repeatedly advises the aspirant to adhere to a master who is well-aware of interior as well as exterior knowledge and lives in accordance with this. Amongst other things, a fitting master likewise distinguishes himself through his absolute trust in God (*tawakkul*), scrupulousness (*warʿ*), fidelity (*ṣidq*) in his endeavors and his renunciation (*zuhd*) of matters of this world.²⁹ In contrast, serving an unworthy *shaykh*, who lacks the required knowledge or even inclines to this world, has dire consequences for an aspirant in this world as well as the next as he will stagnate on the mystical path.³⁰

Once the *murīd* has found a suitable master, who is in turn willing to train him, he pledges his allegiance (*bayʿa*) to the *shaykh*.³¹ As for the aspirant's supposed behavior towards his master, Abū Madyan provides only very scant information. He merely points out that it is appropriate for the *murīd* to be pleasing, friendly and mild-mannered in a general way, but not specifically in relation to his *shaykh*.³² We find a more concrete picture with regard to the master's duties towards the aspirant. Like in the case of ʿAbd al-Qādir, the *shaykh* is equally asked to be sensible, patient and compassionate in dealing with the aspirant, not overburdening him, for example, with personal devotions to God (*awrād*) and only assigning him what he knows the aspirant can sustain and through which the aspirant finds joy and advances spiritually. In this sense, he is also not to exaggerate the importance of minor slips of the *murīd*. On the whole, akin to ʿAbd al-Qādir's viewpoint, the *shaykh* fulfills the role as a spiritual trainer (*murabbī*) of the aspirant, being responsible for all aspects connected to the aspirant's spiritual advancement; whether basic religious duties, more advanced practices such as retreat (*khalwa*) and the various forms of fasting, or appropriate conduct such as averting one's look from what is forbidden.³³

Tawba

Another aspect of the mystical path that finds frequent mention in the writings of both ʿAbd al-Qādir and Abū Madyan is *tawba* (return to God). Originally mentioned in the Qur'an,³⁴ *tawba* became a commonly addressed concept in medieval Sufism, often representing the first stage of the path in the typical

29 Ibid., 55, 71, 103.

30 Ibid., 103.

31 Ibid., 71.

32 Ibid., 71.

33 Ibid., 55–7.

34 See for example *sūra* 2:37, 9:112, 24:31 or 25:70.

ṣūfī manuals.³⁵ The frequency and manner in which it is depicted by these two authors is however noteworthy.

'Abd al-Qādir, whose treatment of *tawba* falls into the *Ghunya* but not specifically into *Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn*, differentiates between three forms of 'returning to God'. The first most basic form sees a believer turn from sinful to sound acting, in accordance with the divinely decreed law. The second form of *tawba* he defines as 'pure *tawba*' (*tawba mujarrada*), because it refers to a believer affirming his sincere devotion to God (*khāliṣ li-llāh*), not in a state of sin but in a state of perfect uprightness and obedience. This second type of *tawba* does not arise from a human motivation to repent of falling into sinful behavior or to forestall such because of temptation. Rather, man simply reaffirms his sincere devotion to God.³⁶

The first kind of *tawba* is conceived for the regular believer who has transgressed the limits of the divinely decreed law, yet upon realizing this he repents.³⁷ The second kind, in contrast, characterizes a mystical adept, who is no longer supposed to struggle with the boundaries of the divinely decreed law, but desires to express his genuine commitment to God.³⁸ 'Abd al-Qādir appears to conceive this second form of *tawba* as a recurring action by the mystic, suggesting that any supererogatory performance such as prayers, *dhikr* or fasting is only accepted by God if it is preceded by this kind of *tawba* and performed in a state of purity of the heart (*tahārat al-qalb*).³⁹ In this sense, the *tawba* becomes a ritualized part of any supererogatory act; an internal ablution complementing the external ablution. This is underlined by the reference to '*tahāra*', here describing the state of necessary internal purity brought about by 'pure *tawba*', but which commonly signifies the state of external purity required for ritual prayers, obtained through external ablution.

Beyond this, there is a third form of *tawba* discernible in the *Ghunya*. Unlike the first two forms which are depicted as recurrent acts, this third form represents a more fundamental and permanent change of mind. For 'Abd al-Qādir this form of returning to God reveals itself in controlling one's tongue, protecting one's heart from ill-feeling towards others, leaving behind those whose lacking moral compass undermines one's resolution and being ready for death

35 See for example al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālat al-qushayrīyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutūb al-ʿIlmiyya, 2001), 126–33.

36 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 159, 166–7.

37 Ibid., 160–4, 166–83.

38 Which is of course not to say that mystics do not fall prey to occasional lapses and hence require repentance in the form of conventional *tawba*.

39 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 328.

all the while striving for obedience to God and continuously seeking His countenance in contemplation (*mushāhada*).⁴⁰ The author here seems to point to adopting a new perspective on life, which involves one's focus on God alone at the same time as abandoning worldly matters. It signifies, in other words, the embracing of the mystical path, a one-time event of crucial importance. As Gerhard Böwering has shown, *tawba*, in this sense, symbolized in early Sufism the seminal event of man's first encounter with God, and hence the outset on the mystical path, which resulted in a 'radical reorientation to God' and the leaving behind of the illusory lower world.⁴¹

The *Ghunya* presents this type of 'returning to God', epitomized by the adoption of the mystical cloak, as the ideal means to protect oneself from falling into hypocrisy (*riyā'*). For this reason it urges the reader to seek the presence and join the ranks of the people of the mystical cloak. While man is never infallible to sentiments of hypocrisy and pride, even at the highest stages of mysticism, adopting the mystical path, especially when reaching its more advanced stages, makes one far less likely to fall prey to such.⁴²

The concept of *tawba* equally plays an important role in the thinking of Abū Madyan, as he devotes an entire chapter to it in *Bidāyat al-murīd*. Of the numerous references to it, we can likewise detect three different forms of 'returning to God'. Predictably *Bidāyat al-murīd* features the basic and commonly known form of a believer turning away from sinful behavior in repentance.⁴³ Appropriately, Abū Madyan twice cites a prophetic *ḥadīth* saying that "one who returns to God from sin, is like one who has no sin at all".⁴⁴ There are furthermore occasions when he appears to allude with *tawba* to the sort of ritual preceding mystical practices, as mentioned by 'Abd al-Qādir, but the evidence is inconclusive.⁴⁵

At the same time, Abū Madyan perceives *tawba* as a more lasting outlook on life. In this way, he holds it to be a religious duty (*farḍ*) for any Muslim, the fulfillment of which hinges on the performance of all other religious duties

40 Ibid., 189.

41 Gerhard Böwering, "Early Sufism between Persecution and Heresy", in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversy and Polemic*, ed. John de Jong and Bernd Radtke, (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 45–53.

42 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 164–6, 303.

43 Abū Madyan, 'Bidāyat al-murīd', 71, 99.

44 Ibid., 99, 107. This prophetic tradition is according to Cornell found in Ibn Mājjā's *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, see *ibid.*, 106.

45 Ibid., 71, 81. There are also references to a custom of 'purifying one's thoughts' (*yaṣfū khāṭiru-hu*) before mystical practices, which seems to allude to the same idea, but he relies in this on another Arabic root ṣ-ḥ-ā, see for example, *ibid.*, 89.

(*al-farā'id*). *Bidāyat al-murīd* establishes that the maintenance of all religious duties forms the basis to *tawba*; so that a believer, who neglects but one aspect of his religious duties, has lost his status of one 'returned to God'. In this sense, *tawba* becomes an indicator of a believer's full conformance with the religious duties, and by extension, his absolute adherence to the prophetic *sunna*, since this delineates the religious duties.⁴⁶

This enduring form of 'returning to God', which applies to all believers,⁴⁷ overlaps with what Abū Madyan has in mind for the mystical aspirant or the mystical adept (*faqīr*). He obviously expects a *murīd* to uphold all religious duties, but beyond that there are a few indications that he demands something more exacting from the mystical wayfarer. *Bidāyat al-murīd* elucidates that for one who 'returns to God'

... it is necessary that he irrevocably renounces this world and any form of disobedience to God and that he remains ever contemplative and acts [in accordance with this], fearful, weeping, saddened ... and that he shows affection to [the other] mystics (*fuqarā'*), is compassionate to the poor (*masākīn*), a mediator [with God] on behalf of the poor showing them affection and that he visits *shaykhs*.⁴⁸

Aspects such as 'the renunciation of this world', 'contemplation', 'showing affection to fellow mystics', 'acting as a mediator with God on behalf of the poor' and 'visiting *shaykhs*' go well beyond the maintenance of the regular religious duties, mentioned as part of the *tawba* for all believers, and point to the kind of 'radical reorientation' that takes place when adopting the mystical path. Hence with this last type of 'returning to God', Abū Madyan appears to coincide with the third kind of *tawba* of 'Abd al-Qādir.

Sincerity and Fidelity

Both 'Abd al-Qādir and Abū Madyan are keen to stress the all-embracing importance of sincerity and fidelity. Although, it cannot be said that this is unexpected, as concepts such as 'sincerity' and 'genuineness' feature commonly in medieval *ṣūfī* literature, the sustained attention given to 'sincerity', and related concepts, in the works under discussion warrants an examination.

'Abd al-Qādir shows himself particularly concerned with two concepts; 'sincere devotion to God' (*khālīṣ li-llāh/ikhlāṣ*) and 'fidelity' (*ṣidq*). As already

46 Ibid., 105, 111.

47 Ibid., 105, 111.

48 Ibid., 109.

seen above, the former concept emerges in the context of 'pure *tawba*', when a mystic professes his 'sincere devotion to God' in a state of complete uprightness. The phrase '*khālīṣ li-llāh*', signifies 'sincere devotion to God' in the sense of 'genuineness' as well as in the sense of 'purity' or 'untaintedness' by anything that is incompatible with this devotion, like sin or disobedience. The mystic hence not only declares his 'sincere devotion to God', but in the same manner confirms his ongoing disavowal of any form of sin or self-attachment. In this sense he makes sure of a state of absolute inner purity before performing his worship.

The term *ikh-lāṣ* can also be defined as 'sincere devotion to God'; it derives just like *khālīṣ li-llāh* from the Arabic root *kh-l-ṣ* and holds in this setting the same significance. With *ikh-lāṣ* 'Abd al-Qādir means specifically that one intends one's work exclusively for God, whereas failing to do so leads to hypocrisy (*riyā'*), preoccupation with the exterior (*ru'yat al-khalq*) and pride (*'ujb*).⁴⁹ The danger of falling into hypocrisy is a repeatedly addressed issue in the *Ghunya*, and, as said before, 'Abd al-Qādir promotes embracing the mystical path as the best means to counteract this, even if one is, in his opinion, never entirely immune to it.

Closely connected to this is the concept of 'fidelity' (*ṣidq*), at times also alluded to in its adjectival form *ṣādiq*. In the words of the *Ghunya*, 'fidelity' simply denotes the "complete agreement of the interior with the exterior",⁵⁰ always under the assumption, of course, that the interior is submitted to and focused on God, rather than one's lower soul or human passions. After all, we are, here not just discussing 'fidelity', but in fact 'fidelity to God'. What 'Abd al-Qādir means by that is that the mystic, by focusing on God alone and leaving worldly matters behind, increasingly surrenders his heart, or his interior, to God. In this way, he gradually hands over his initiative to Him, a process which eventually sees the mystic morph into the embodiment of divine will and command, as outlined in 'Abd al-Qādir's other major work *Futūḥ al-ghayb*.⁵¹ 'Fidelity' hence stands for acting in accordance with one's interior, which follows the divine initiative to varying degrees, depending on one's standing on the path.⁵²

Abū Madyan draws similar attention to the genuineness of one's conduct and the danger of falling into hypocrisy. In connection with this, he likewise

49 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 330–8.

50 Ibid., 490.

51 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *Futūḥ al-ghayb*. See for a discussion on this Pascal Held, 'The Ḥanbalī school and mysticism in sixth/twelfth-century Baghdad' (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2016), 18–67.

52 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 445–7, 450–1.

relies heavily on the Arabic root *ṣ-d-q*, from which *ṣidq* and *ṣādiq* derive. His interpretation of the term '*ṣidq*', and the derivations thereof, appears to be akin to 'Abd al-Qādir's. *Bidāyat al-murīd* states that "the distinguishing mark of 'fidelity to God' (*ṣidq*) is the renunciation of this world, while the distinguishing mark of heresy (*zandaqa*) is the desire for it".⁵³ Such an abandonment of this world is obviously the result of one's firm commitment to God.

In particular, Abū Madyan makes use of *ṣādiq*, accordingly meaning one 'who exhibits fidelity to God', to characterize a sound *shaykh* or mystic (*faqīr*).⁵⁴ Leaving behind this world and focusing on God alone obviously goes hand in hand with inner purification. We learn that "... the characteristic of the mystic who exhibits fidelity to God (*al-faqīr al-ṣādiq*), whom God has honored and placed amongst His friends,... [is that] his likeness is like the earth, enduring [at the outside] all that is repulsive, while being of pure heart".⁵⁵ In order to underline the paramount importance of this point, *Bidāyat al-murīd* follows up immediately with the explanation that "Sufism (*al-taṣawwuf*)⁵⁶ is not about showing oneself adherent to principles (*tashhīd al-aḥkām*) or gradual advancement [along the path] (*tadrij al-aqdām*), indeed Sufism is about the soundness of the heart (*al-taṣawwuf bi-salāmat al-ṣudūr*) ...".⁵⁷

It is for this overriding concern with the mystic's inner life that Abū Madyan warns of falling into hypocrisy. Accordingly, in his opinion it is the *shaykh's* responsibility to make sure that a *murīd* does not get anywhere close to falling into hypocrisy by taking liberties (*idlāl-hi bi-suqūṭ al-riyā*).⁵⁸ In any case, an aspirant's genuine desire for God (*ḥaqīqat al-irāda*) is only confirmed upon completely leaving behind hypocrisy.⁵⁹ At the same time, *Bidāyat al-murīd* warns on several occasions of those pretentious individuals and groups whose allegiance with the mystical path is only skin deep. Hence they claim to have such a genuine desire for God and pretend to follow the path by dressing accordingly, but they are in fact nothing but hypocrites.⁶⁰

53 Abū Madyan, 'Bidāyat al-murīd', 65.

54 See for example *ibid.*, 65, 71, 73, 87, 89, 91, 97.

55 *Ibid.*, 89–91.

56 I exceptionally use here the term 'Sufism', due to the *Bidāyat al-murīd's* unusual reference to the term '*taṣawwuf*'. As already pointed out above, I otherwise prefer to use the term 'mysticism' for the purposes of this study, for reasons which should become clear in the next section.

57 Abū Madyan, 'Bidāyat al-murīd', 91.

58 *Ibid.*, 57. See also 'Abd al-Qādir's use of the term *ḥaqīqat al-irāda* and his treatment of *irāda*, 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 439–41.

59 Abū Madyan, 'Bidāyat al-murīd', 63.

60 See for example *ibid.*, 91, 99, 101.

Sufism

In both works, the treatment of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) and *ṣūfīs* is closely related to the discussion on inner purity and the sincerity of one's commitment to God. The *ṣūfī* movement is believed to have formed in third/ninth-century Baghdad, whereupon it spread to the other regions of the Islamic world and absorbed most of the other local pietistic and mystical movements. Thus, many medieval and modern scholars regard Sufism as broadly representative of mystical trends in Islam from about the second half of the fourth/tenth-century onwards. The references to 'Sufism' and '*ṣūfīs*' in these two works provide however a more nuanced picture.

'Abd al-Qādir hardly ever resorts to the term 'Sufism', or variations thereof, in the *Ghunya* or in *Futūḥ al-ghayb*, his other main work. On the first occasion we come across the term '*ṣūfī*' in the *Ghunya*, it is in a negative context. At the end of a prolonged discussion on hypocrisy, in which the author exhorts readers to be on guard against falling prey to such and gives a number of traditions on the topic of hypocrisy, we read a report on Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's (d. 110/728) disapproval of his companion Farqad al-Sanjī's⁶¹ dressing in wool (*ṣūf*). Ḥasan, who is dressed in a fine piece of clothing, complains that *ṣūfīs* merely show off their asceticism at the outside, but that they are arrogant in their hearts. Out of that, he holds the dress of wool to be the dress of the people of hellfire and his own fine dress to be the dress of the people of the paradisiacal garden.⁶²

In his response on the issue of dressing, 'Abd al-Qādir examines the matter on three different levels corresponding to his division of the mystical path in *Futūḥ al-ghayb*.⁶³ While he does not per se speak out against wearing wool, he advises that at the lowest stage, which also includes the *murīd*, an individual should dress in a way that does not give fellow men or the divinely decreed law grounds for complaints against him. 'Abd al-Qādir seems to fear that by standing out from contemporary customs through one's clothes, a newly initiated wayfarer treads dangerous ground, exposing himself to hypocrisy. It is, according to the *Ghunya*, only at the second stage, when one has become more firmly established on the path, that one risks standing out by reducing one's clothing to the bare minimum, so as to break the shackles of self-attachment. Yet, there

61 Or Farqad al-Sinjī, who also seems to have been known under the name Farqad al-Sabakhī.

62 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 337. There are apparently a number of similar stories featuring these two protagonists conveying roughly the same purport through somewhat varying details, which does not speak for this particular report's authenticity. This is, however, of no consequence to our discussion. See for this Christopher Melchert, 'Farqad al-Sabakhī', in *EL*.

63 See for this Held, 'The Ḥanbalī school and mysticism', 18–67.

is no indication that this should be done by donning wool. The *badal*, at the third level, in any case leaves it entirely up to God to provide his attire, but, given that he has, at this stage, given up his previous ascetic lifestyle, donning a woolen garb would be inappropriate.⁶⁴

The *Ghunya*'s recommendations regarding clothing are hence relatively undefined, with the main point being that clothing and external appearance are trivial in the face of inner purity. At most, it is a cover to one's inner workings. Those who identify through their clothing and show off their mystical endeavors in public, as the *ṣūfis* in Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's report, are in ‘Abd al-Qādir's mind led by their lower souls (*naḥs*) and self-attachment.

That ‘Abd al-Qādir is troubled by such exoteric tendencies of so-called *ṣūfis* in his time is also obvious in the second mention of the term in the *Ghunya*. There, he is at pains to explain the term, and derivations of it, and place it within the specific framework of his spiritual development. We find out that *ṣūfī*

originally [refers to] *ṣūfiya* in accordance with the verb pattern *fū‘īla*, taken from [the verbal noun] *muṣāfā*, and denotes a believer whom God treats with equally pure affection (*‘abdan ṣāfā-hu al-ḥaqq*). It is for this reason said that ‘a *ṣūfī* is whoever is unblemished by the shortcomings of the lower soul (*ṣāfiyan min āfāt al-naḥs*), [and] devoid of its blameworthy aspects.⁶⁵

Thus, the author dismisses the idea commonly held in medieval as well as modern times, that *ṣūfī* denotes a ‘person donning wool (*ṣūf*)’, derived from the Arabic root ṣ-ā-f.⁶⁶ Instead he suggests that the origin of the term is found

64 ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 337–8.

65 Ibid., 442.

66 That said, a number of well-known medieval mystics before ‘Abd al-Qādir show themselves already reluctant to attribute *ṣūfī* to wool (*ṣūf*), see, for example, Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī, *al-Ta‘arruḥ li-madḥhab ahl al-taṣawwuf* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2001), 5–9, Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālat al-qushayriyya*, 311–15, ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān Al-Hūjwīrī, *The Kashf al-Mahjūb; the Oldest Persian Treatise on Sūfism*, by ‘Alī B. ‘Uthmān al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (Leiden, Brill, 1911), 30–5. While they generally concede that with regard to etymology *ṣūfī* most likely derives from wool (*ṣūf*), they attempt to downplay this seemingly fearing, just like this author, an over-identification of their contemporaries with wearing wool. Most of them seek likewise to relate it to purity (*ṣāfā*) or other putative origins of the term, like ‘the first line’ (*al-ṣaff al-awwal*) or ‘the people of the vestibule’ (*ahl al-ṣuffā*). Yet, none of them tries to etymologically derive the term *ṣūfī* from the root ṣ-f-ā or to connect it to its third form passive (*ṣūfiya*), like ‘Abd al-Qādir. On the

in the root *ṣ-f-ā*, which in the third form passive becomes *ṣūfiya*. The unsaid assumption behind this theory appears to be that *ṣūfiya* turned over time into *ṣūfī*.

The term '*ṣūfī*' should therefore in this context be understood as 'one whom God treats with equally sincere love', with the implication being that this refers to a well-advanced mystic who has undergone a prolonged period of purification and who has proven his sincere devotion to God, to the point that the Latter treats him with equally pure affection.⁶⁷ The root *ṣ-f-ā*, from which *ṣūfiya* comes, has in its first form the meaning of a person being 'pure' 'sincere' and 'wholeheartedly devoted to something or someone', and 'Abd al-Qādir goes to great lengths over the subsequent paragraphs to characterize the *ṣūfī* in this way. Thus, the *ṣūfī* is, for instance, described as 'becoming unblemished by impurity' (*yusfā min aḥdāth* or *yusfā min al-takaddur*) or 'unblemished by the shortcomings of the lower soul' (*ṣāfiyan min āfāt al-nafs*).⁶⁸

The whole point of this etymological re-interpretation of '*ṣūfī*' is evidently to divest it of its outward connotation and infuse it instead with inward significance. It so morphs from a feature of external dressing to a certification of inner accomplishment. 'Abd al-Qādir's attempts reveal that he was concerned about the trends of so-called *ṣūfīs*, prioritizing appearance over inner purity. Following this, he briefly seeks to place the term within the framework of his mystical path, but it becomes clear that '*ṣūfī*' is not innate to 'Abd al-Qādir's thinking. It appears more like a foreign concept placed in a familiar framework so as to explain it to the reader, which is additionally highlighted by the fact that he does not make use of it beyond the two occasions mentioned here.

Abū Madyan's treatment of the terms '*ṣūfī*' and 'Sufism' goes along similar lines. Indeed, *Bidāyat al-murīd* is more pronounced in its negative depiction of the concepts and barely ever applies them to positive context. Thus, we read that

in our time, there has come to us a group who call themselves *ṣūfīs*, they embellish [their] exterior and defile [their] interior by being inclined to pleasures, they habitually playact during audition and remain deviant from the path by [customs] not based on the *sunna* ... they are marked [outwardly] by great endeavor, but steer clear of practicing personal

other hand, many other medieval writers such as al-Sarrāj, Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn Taymiyya accept the theory that *ṣūfī* derived from wool (*ṣūf*).

67 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 442.

68 Ibid., 442.

devotions to God ... they [falsely] claim essential union with God (*ittiṣāl*) and mutual unveiling and spiritual insight....⁶⁹

In the same paragraphs the *ṣūfis* are additionally denounced for eating forbidden food, not acting in accordance with religious knowledge, not striving for inner *jihād*, associating freely with women, ripping their clothes due to their desires, and claiming dubious interior knowledge.⁷⁰ On other occasions, Abū Madyan shows himself likewise critical of *ṣūfis*' conduct during audition or he reiterates his displeasure at their tendencies to give attention to their outward appearance at the expense of their inner purity, by citing a number of disparaging reports.⁷¹

It emerges that Abū Madyan shares much the same concerns about the practice of Sufism during his time, as does 'Abd al-Qādir. He likewise characterizes it as pretentious and superficial and being devoid of commitment, genuine spiritual accomplishments and religious knowledge. It is not that Abū Madyan is per se opposed to Sufism, as he does, though on very rare occasions, associate himself with *ṣūfis*.⁷² Overall, however, the concept has a negative representation in *Bidāyat al-murīd*.

Given his unease about the practice of Sufism in his days, Abū Madyan, just like 'Abd al-Qādir, resorts to reaffirming the values which in his eyes epitomize Sufism, in an extract that we have already come across. For him

Sufism (*al-taṣawwuf*) is not about showing oneself adherent to principles (*tashhīd al-aḥkām*) or gradual advancement [along the path] (*tadrīj al-aqdām*), indeed Sufism is about the soundness of the heart (*al-taṣawwuf bi-salāmat al-ṣudūr*), unwavering commitment (*sakhāwat al-nufūs*), imitation of what has been revealed [by God] and knowledge of what has been sent [by God] ... whoever abandons these springs of well-being (*mawārid*) [surely] finds himself grazing in the garden of Satan ...⁷³

Bidāyat al-murīd, in the same manner as the *Ghunya*, seeks to link Sufism with inward purity and dedication, in addition to adherence to the Qur'an and the *sunna*, rather than external attributes, such as following certain principles and rules.

69 Abū Madyan, 'Bidāyat al-murīd', 85.

70 Ibid., 85.

71 Ibid., 83, 101.

72 Ibid., 89.

73 Ibid., 91.

Yet, perhaps the best indication for their uncomfortable relationship with the concepts 'Sufism' and '*ṣūfī*' lies in the fact that both authors, with the exception of the said negative contexts, simply do not rely on those terms when generally discussing mystical endeavors or individuals involved in this.⁷⁴ Rather, they employ the word '*faqīr*' (pl. *fuqarā*'), its noun form being '*faqr*', which literally means 'poor' or 'impoverished' in Arabic. The designation '*faqīr*' and its Persian equivalent '*darvīsh*', became increasingly common in Islamic mysticism from the fifth/eleventh-century onwards, conveying a number of meanings. On a basic level, it identified a pious person, who willingly adopted life in poverty and, in combination with this, social marginality.⁷⁵ Some have associated the term with a counter-movement to the increasingly ritualized and systematized forms mysticism took on with the arrival of the *ṣūfī* orders (*ṭarīqa*). Others have argued that *faqīr* became in the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth-century an increasingly popular alternative to the term '*ṣūfī*', while having roughly the same connotations.⁷⁶

Both 'Abd al-Qādir and Abū Madyan basically define a *faqīr* as an individual who renounces this world for being in the presence of God, who is devoted to God and yearns for Him, who practices introspection and keeps his inside flawless, who adheres to the Qur'an and the *sunna*, and who treats his fellow *faqīr* affectionately and selfless.⁷⁷ The *faqīr* is however not to be confused with the *murīd*, as he is a mystic who has completed his novitiate but whose standing on the path is otherwise undefined. It seems most apt to interpret the term '*faqīr*' in this setting as a 'regular mystic', and therefore as an alternative designation to how the term '*ṣūfī*' was used.

Samā'

Both the *Ghunya* and *Bidāyat al-murīd* devote considerable attention to audition (*samā'*), a custom which was as widespread and diverse in its application as it was controversial. On a basic level, *samā'* refers to a gathering of mystics, who listen to a recitation of the Qur'an, poetry or music in order to stimulate their 'emotional chord', whereupon they might find ecstasy (*wajd*), and hence greater proximity to God. Since audition was often associated with the popularization of Sufism and commonly entailed such contentious practices as listening to profane poetry, singing and dancing, it was oftentimes considered as

74 With very rare exceptions such as *ibid.*, 89.

75 Alexandre Papas, 'Dervish', in *EL*.

76 Th. E. Homerin, 'Ibn Taimiyya's al-ṣūfiyyah wa-al-fuqarā', *Arabica* 32 (1985): 235.

77 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, *al-Ghunya*, 455–6; Abū Madyan, "Bidāyat al-murīd", 73, 87, 95, 97; Held, 'The Ḥanbalī school and mysticism', 68–140.

*rukḥṣa*⁷⁸ amongst mystical circles and outright banned as contrary to Islam by legal scholars.⁷⁹

It comes as something of a surprise that 'Abd al-Qādir and Abū Madyan endorse audition as an entirely legitimate part of the mystical path,⁸⁰ given that both can be described as strictly law-abiding mystics.⁸¹ The *Ghunya* defines audition as a 'recurrent custom' (*sunna*) between God and His friends, as they encounter Him and divine speech is heard.⁸² *Bidāyat al-murīd*, on the other hand, begins the chapter devoted to the same theme by stating that *samā'* is sound and the path of God's friends and the pious, a fact that is doubted only by the ignorant. To reinforce his argument, Abū Madyan cites the famous *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet experiences rapture and his cloak drops from his shoulders upon listening to a poem of Ḥassān b. Thābit.⁸³

That being said, 'Abd al-Qādir and Abū Madyan's approval of the practice comes with a number of stipulations. For one, both authors point to the private and exclusive nature of audition. Much as it describes 'true *samā'*' as a 'recurrent custom', the *Ghunya*'s insists that this applies only to those elects permitted into the proximity of God; the 'select mystics' (*'ayān*), 'friends' (*awliyā'*), 'those standing in lieu of His will' (*abdāl*) and 'those who know Him' (*'ulamā bi-hi*).⁸⁴ *Bidāyat al-murīd* recommends, in similar manner, that the practice should be conducted in a closed setting, limited to those initiated (*ahl al-samā'*).⁸⁵ The latter are characterized by such features as their renunciation of this world and their turning to (*tawba*) and attachment to God, their ascetic lifestyle and supererogatory acts of worship, their introspection and

78 That is, belonging to 'a lenient code of ethical regulations' for the common believers as opposed to 'a strict one' (*'azīma*) for the mystics. On 'azīma and *rukḥṣa*, see, Samuela Pagani, 'The Meaning of the Ikhtilāf al-Madhāhib in 'Abd al-Wahāb al-Sha'rānī's al-Mizān al-Kubrā', *Islamic Law and Society* 11.2 (2004): 190–1; Florian Sobieroj, 'Ibn Khafīf's al-Kitāb al-Iqdiṣād and Abū al-Najīb al-Suhrawardī's Adāb al-Murīdīn, A Comparison between Two Works on the Training of Novices', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 43.2 (1998): 327–45; and R. Peters and J.G.J. ter Haar, 'Rukḥṣa', in *Encyclopedia of Islam (Second Edition)*, Brill online, <http://www.brillonline.nl/> (hereafter *EL*₂).

79 Fritz Meier, 'The Dervish Dance; an Attempt at an Overview', in *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, 39.

80 See for example, Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan*, 34.

81 See also below for further discussion on juridical mysticism.

82 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 466.

83 Abū Madyan, 'Bidāyat al-murīd', 81. See also *ibid.*, 83, for further discussion on the soundness of *samā'*.

84 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 466.

85 Abū Madyan, 'Bidāyat al-murīd', 83, 89.

truthfulness or their adherence to the *sunna*, in other words largely coinciding with the definition of *faqīr* above.⁸⁶

Just as important is the condition that the audition has to be based on the Qur'an,⁸⁷ rather than poetry or singing. 'Abd al-Qādir's argument in this case is quite simply that

if they [the mystics] exhibit fidelity in their intentions, in their exclusive devotion to Him and in their behavior (*law ṣadaqū fī qaṣḍi-him wa-tajarrudi-him wa-taṣarrufi-him*), their hearts and members will only get stirred by hearing the speech of God (*lamā inza'ajū fī qulūbi-him wa-jawāriḥi-him bi-ghayr samā' kalām allāh*), because it is the speech (*kalām*) of their Beloved....⁸⁸

In other words, as the audition is about meeting God, the Beloved, what else than His own speech, namely the Qur'an, should serve as a source for this? While the *Ghunya* stresses this point on several occasions,⁸⁹ Abū Madyan is somewhat less emphatic about this. Nevertheless, he notes, when relating about his own experience of *samā'*, that they would be transported to ecstatic states either on the basis of the Qur'an, the *sunna* or divine promise and threat (*al-wa'd wa-l-wa'īd*), which were in turn likely based on verses of the Qur'an.⁹⁰

It should be pointed out that, with some exceptions such as the Western Maghreb, this perspective was overall becoming less and less common in the medieval Islamic world. Even though the recitation of the Qur'an played a major role in the context of audition in the third/ninth and forth/tenth-century, together with the recitation of poetry, music and singing, it became thereafter gradually replaced by those other means. In the time of the two individuals

86 Ibid., 81. This means also the absolute beginner on the mystical path (*mubtadi'*), which is not to say an aspirant (*murīd*) should not take part in *samā'*, with which 'Abd al-Qādir agrees. Ibid., 81; 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 450–1, 465–8.

87 Or in Abū Madyan's case based on the *sunna*, which 'Abd al-Qādir does not mention, but would hardly have objected to. See also below.

88 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 466.

89 Ibid., 451, 466.

90 Such as the verses 4:122, 5:9, 9:68, 9:72, 24:55, to name just a few. Abū Madyan, 'Bidāyat al-murīd'; 89. There is an ambiguous suggestion that Abū Madyan might even have tolerated, if not endorsed, the playing of the flute by mystics, based on a report that the legendary Bahlūl al-Majnūn also did so. Abū Madyan clarifies however that one who plays the flute should share Bahlūl's asceticism and renunciation of this world, as it would otherwise be counted against him. All the same, there is no explicit connection to the practice of audition and the remark occurs in a later chapter. Ibid., 99.

discussed here, recitation of poetry had on the whole become far more widespread for the purposes of *samā'*.⁹¹ Perhaps the best indication for this trend is Abu Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī's compelling and comprehensive case for the advantages of using poetry instead of the Qur'an for *samā'*.⁹²

The single most important aspect of audition and the true indicator of the soundness of such is the genuine behavior of those involved. Initially, it was held that *samā'*, in the sense of 'hearing' divine speech and hence being transported to a rapturous state, for one, only happened intermittently and, for another, was not in the hands of the mystic, but in the hands of God alone. It was, out of this, unnatural, according to most writers, for a mystic to be granted such an experience on every occasion he attended an audition session, or for all participants to be touched by such a state in the same event. Consequently, it was considered apt that an attendee behaved naturally, that is to say, compliant with his inner state, surrendering the initiative to God and refraining from feigning unnatural feelings and states. Things gradually changed with the increasing popularization of Sufism in the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth-century, when rapturous transport became a fixed and expected part of every *samā'* session. It became, under these circumstances, common for attendees to feign mystical states.

The *Ghunya* takes issue with this trend. It opens its discussion on conduct during audition with a reminder that one should not behave in affected manner and that mystical states are not subject to one's whims and desires.⁹³ On account of this, there is a clear division between the participant who exhibits fidelity (*ṣādiq*) in his conduct, and the wrongful pretenders (*mudda'īn*).⁹⁴ The former "... whose Beloved (*maḥbūb*) is not absent [from him] nor is he estranged from his intimate Friend but he is [rather] constantly growing closer in nearness and proximity [to Him] ... nothing incites his fervor and desire ... except [hearing] the speech from the One whom he desires which is his Lord ...".⁹⁵ As the *Ghunya* explains, such a mystic becomes stirred and excited by what he hears of the divine speech, as a result of the flame of his fidelity (*nā'irat ṣidqi-hi*), which draws him in entirely.⁹⁶

91 Again, with some exceptions like the Western Maghreb.

92 Leonard Lewisohn, "The Sacred Music of Islam; Samā' in the Persian Sufi Tradition", *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 6 (1997): 19–21.

93 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 465.

94 Ibid., 450–1.

95 Ibid., 451.

96 Ibid., 451.

‘Abd al-Qādir, accordingly, relies again on the concept of ‘fidelity’ (*ṣidq*) and ‘exhibiting fidelity’ (*ṣādiq*), to define a mystic who leaves it in God’s hands to bring about ecstatic states and who acts genuinely during audition. Previously, he alluded to this with his proviso that mystics who exhibit fidelity (*ṣadaqū*) in their intentions only become stimulated by divine speech, i.e. the Qur’an. As we recall, one central feature of ‘fidelity’ for ‘Abd al-Qādir is to surrender all initiative to God,⁹⁷ which corresponds with his point here. In contrast to this, we find the wrongful pretenders, who are steered by their base instincts and thus “... [behave like] riding animals [reined by] passions and mounts [reined by] urges and natural dispositions, following anybody who screams or clamors”.⁹⁸

How highly ‘Abd al-Qādir rates sincere conduct during *samāʿ* becomes evident in his acknowledgement that, while he does not visibly approve of audition being accompanied by poetry, music, and dancing, some amongst those who practice such are undeniable ‘exhibiting fidelity’ in what they do.⁹⁹ Despite the fact that it arouses his dislike and deviates from his ideals, he is thus willing to concede that even such a flawed setting cannot undermine a mystic’s fidelity, which is another way of saying that what really matters is above all one’s genuine conduct.

Abū Madyan agrees that genuine behavior is absolutely inevitable in this context. He explains that when those initiated (*ahl al-samāʿ*) “hear divine insight (*ʿilm*) [during audition], their flames (*nāʾira*)¹⁰⁰ of love stir in their hearts and give appearance to their exterior, in their ecstasy they take up the station of the possessed ... to them *samāʿ* is permissible because their ecstasy turns out in truth, fidelity (*ṣidq*) and authenticity”.¹⁰¹ The emphasis is, for that reason, on a dynamic, in which the heart, as the hub of love, is the starting point for ecstatic feelings that thereafter spread and take over the exterior. The audition becomes in this way sincere and truthful.

The author draws attention to the same point when he remarks that “*samāʿ* is divine truth but also human fabrication (*al-samāʿ ḥaqq wa-khalq*); whoever hears through his heart is confirmed by divine truth (*taḥaqqqaqa*) and whoever hears through his lower soul (*nafs*) is proven a hypocrite (*tazandaqa*)”.¹⁰² In keeping with the *Ghunya*’s concern, *Bidāyat al-murīd* informs us that genuine rapture comes from God alone and cannot be fabricated by man. We recall, in

97 See above in the discussion on ‘sincerity’.

98 ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 450–1.

99 Ibid., 450–1.

100 Note the use of flame (*nāʾira*) by both authors in this setting.

101 Abū Madyan, ‘*Bidāyat al-murīd*’, 81.

102 Ibid., 83.

this context, also Abū Madyan's previous account of those *ṣūfīs* whose audition is mere playacting, since they are focused on their exterior at the expense of their interior and inclined towards pleasures. He warns elsewhere, that whoever's audition is not based on authenticity in this way, surely the necklace of Islam will be removed from his neck.¹⁰³ Such affected behavior not only impinges on the individual himself, but likewise on those in his presence. *Bidāyat al-murīd* considers a 'greedy *ṣūfī*', that is, a person who seeks to bring about ecstatic states himself rather than relying on God, as the worst impediment in an audition.¹⁰⁴

While the authors insist on the paramount importance of genuine behavior, they both recognize that people react in widely different ways to being stimulated in this setting. In the *Ghunya* we find cases of mystics whose movements are taken over by an ecstatic force, who take off their clothes, who rush to comply with something that has been revealed to them or who simply sit down quietly and remember God.¹⁰⁵ *Bidāyat al-murīd* notes that individual responses differ due to varying mystical states, stations and levels; so that some sit down while others stir into motion, some laugh while others weep and some moan while others tremble.¹⁰⁶ According to these two works, the sentiments elicited by *samā'*, are by no means confined to ecstatic and blissful love for God, but can also take on the form of such sentiments as fear, regret or being reproved amongst attendees. Varying kinds of responses are legitimate as long as they represent a genuine reflection of one's inner state. Given the unpredictable nature of the responses to audition, 'Abd al-Qādir and Abū Madyan appear to discourage mystics from confronting other participants whom they suspect of acting affectedly or otherwise inappropriately.

Conclusion

This brief discussion, based on these two manuals of instruction for aspirants, hence shows that 'Abd al-Qādir and Abū Madyan coincided in their emphasis and treatment of a number of central aspects of the mystical path. Beyond that, and more significantly, their agreement in these points reveals a shared understanding of the fundamental importance of inner purity in mystical endeavors. With the exception of their treatment of the role of the *shaykh*,

103 Ibid., 85.

104 Ibid., 83.

105 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 450, 466–7.

106 Abū Madyan, 'Bidāyat al-murīd', 83.

inner purity in its various manifestations of 'genuineness', 'fidelity', 'sincerity' or 'sincere devotion' underpinned the two authors' argumentation in all other matters covered here. It becomes clear that concerns for inner purity form the basis of their thinking.

Another aspect that enjoys a similarly pivotal standing is adherence to the Qur'an and the *sunna*, and by extension to Islamic law. Both the *Ghunya* and *Bidāyat al-murīd* are replete with references to either and establish unquestioning obedience to the Qur'an and *sunna* as a necessary principle of any mystical undertaking. By contrast, treatment of actual mystical experiences or even mystical states and stations is relatively limited. While 'Abd al-Qādir and Abū Madyan do refer to such aspects as mystical states (*hāl*) and stations (*maqām*) or ecstasy (*wajd*), especially in the setting of audition, as seen above, other concerns like the said inner purity, renunciation of this world, adherence to Islamic law or proper conduct feature more prominently. On the occasions that the two authors discuss mystical experiences, their portrayal can be characterized as somewhat dispassionate and even somber. This is also seen in their near exclusive reliance on words deriving from the Arabic root *ḥ-b-b*, denoting 'love', as opposed to words coming from the often used root *ʿ-sh-q*, bearing the more ecstatic connotation of 'passionate love' in this setting, when describing love between God and man.¹⁰⁷ Summed up in the words of Abū Madyan, the mystic who exhibits fidelity to God (*al-faqr al-ṣādiq*) resembles a bereaved mother (*thaklā*) in his ecstasy.¹⁰⁸

It should be briefly noted that further parallels between these two manuals of instruction can be found in their common advocacy of social engagement and consciousness, which they perceive as an integral part of the mystical path.¹⁰⁹ Still, all of this does certainly not mean that the *Ghunya* and *Bidāyat al-murīd* are always in harmony and do not diverge at all. There are some notable differences, even beyond the obvious fact that the former is a substantially longer and oftentimes more detailed work, for example, in the *Ghunya*'s efforts to distinguish between a strict (*ʿazīma*) and a lenient (*rukḥṣa*) code of

107 See for example 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 439–41, 445, 451, 460; Abū Madyan, 'Bidāyat al-murīd', 73, 75, 81, 83, 89. For a very rare exception see 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 451.

108 Abū Madyan, 'Bidāyat al-murīd', 89.

109 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 453–62; Abū Madyan, 'Bidāyat al-murīd', 71, 97, 109. Although it should be remarked that in the case of 'Abd al-Qādir, this is more evident from his other main work *Futūḥ al-ghayb*. Vincent Cornell, in his study on Abū Madyan, has already drawn attention to this, Cornell, *Realm of the saint*, 134, 137; Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan*, 19, 33, 35.

ethical regulations or its detailed examination of the custom of taking one's clothes off during audition. *Bidāyat al-murīd*, on the other hand, gives far more attention to fasting, in its various forms, or to analyzing the issue of wearing patched clothing, to point out just a few differences. On the whole, however, this study demonstrates that ‘Abd al-Qādir and Abū Madyan drew from some of the same basic values, which finds reflection in their similar depiction of the mystical path.